APPENDIX C

City of La Quinta General Plan Update: Biological Resources

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CITY OF LA QUINTA
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE: BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

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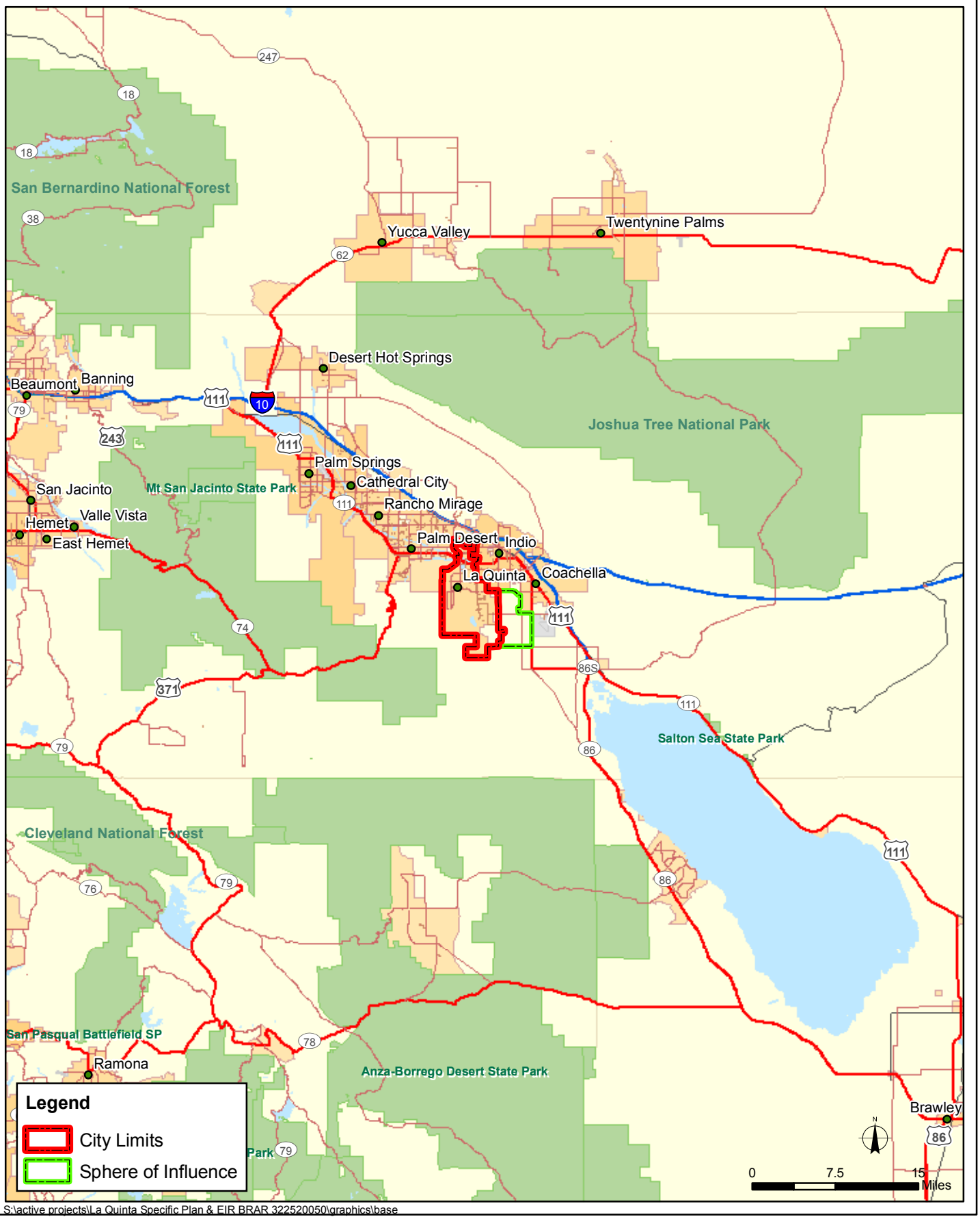
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The City of La Quinta is preparing a revision and update to its General Plan. All relevant information on the natural and built environment is considered in the General Plan, including biological resources within the City and its Sphere of Influence (SOI). This includes a large area east of the current southern city limit, extending east to Highway 86, south to Avenue 62, and north to Avenue 52. A second, small area on the northern boundary of the City is located immediately west of the Bermuda Dunes Country Club and is bisected by Darby Road. Private lands predominate within the City of La Quinta, with some Federal lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) present in the south central portion of the study area (see Maps 1, 2 & 8).

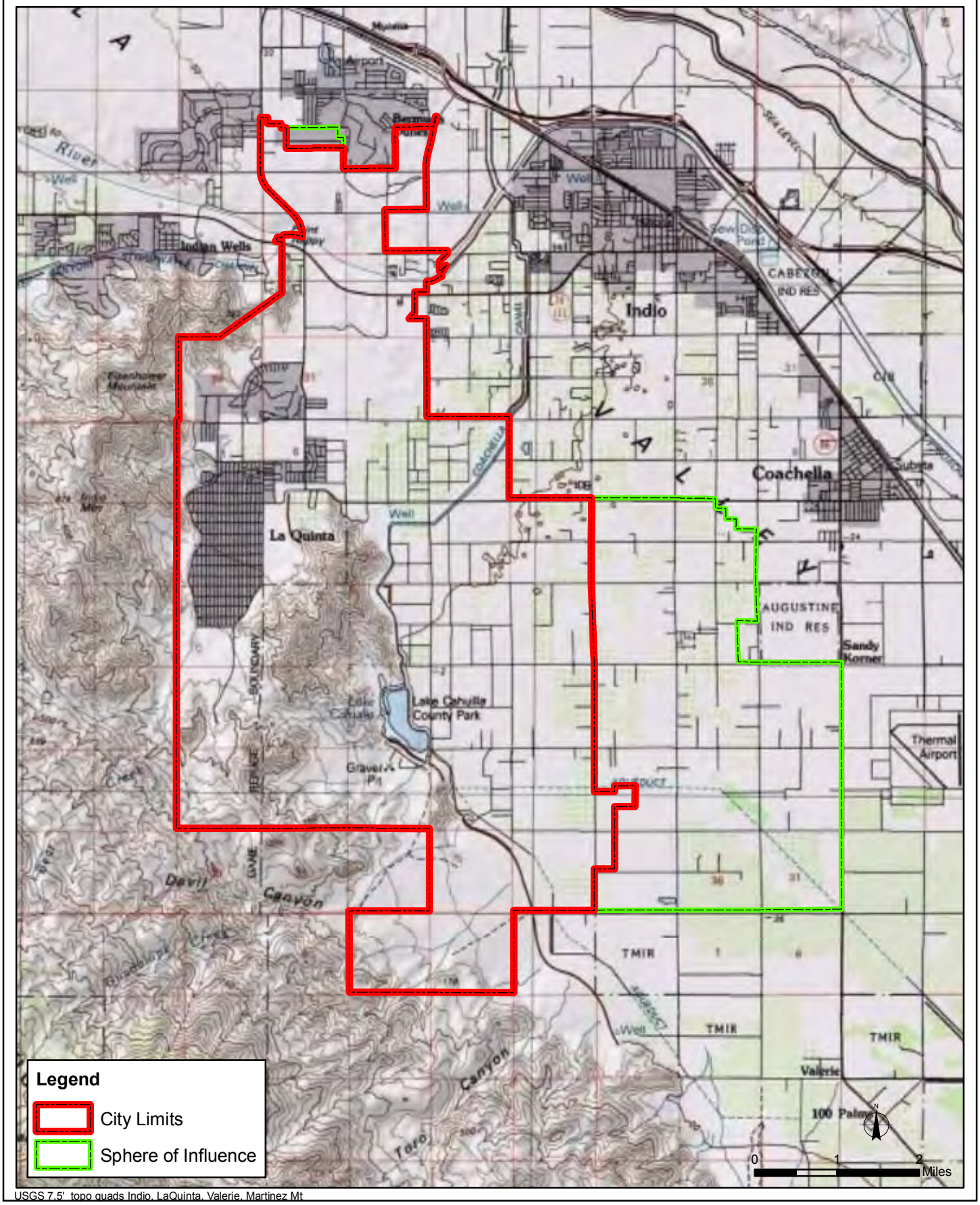
Rapid urbanization and conversion of lands to agriculture in the region has led to the listing of some plant and animal species as threatened or endangered by State and/or Federal governments. As a result of impacts within and outside the Coachella Valley, a total of 11 species in the region are now either state or federally listed as threatened or endangered. A number of other species are either endemic or nearly endemic to the Coachella Valley and could be threatened by future Development, or are rare in the area and require protection to persist in the region. Future development in La Quinta must comply with laws and regulations affording protection to these species. A Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan has been prepared for the entire Coachella Valley and portions of the surrounding mountains to address current and potential future State and Federal Endangered Species Act (ESAs) issues in the Plan Area. Subsequently, a Memorandum of Understanding (Planning Agreement) was developed to govern the preparation of the Plan. In late 1995 and early 1996, the cities of Cathedral City, Coachella, Desert Hot Springs, Indian Wells, Indio, La Quinta, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, and Rancho Mirage; the County of Riverside; USFWS; the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG); the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); the U.S. Forest Service (USFS); and the National Park Service (NPS) (Parties) signed the Planning Agreement to initiate the planning effort. The purpose of the MSHCP is to obtain Take Authorization (Take Permits) pursuant to Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) and the California Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Act for Covered Activities in the Coachella Valley while balancing environmental protection with regional economic objectives and simplifying compliance with the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts and other applicable laws and regulations. Non-listed sensitive biological features, such as state streambeds/federal waters, and rare plants/animals not “covered” by the CVMSHCP, are evaluated in site-specific environmental reviews which identify final necessary mitigation and permitting requirements.

This report describes the General Plan area’s biological features in a programmatic fashion, in order to guide subsequent site-specific evaluation of biological values present in areas identified for development. A primary focus is the identification of potential special status biological resource occurrence areas that are not “covered” under the CVMSHCP within the area that will require additional survey work and permitting.



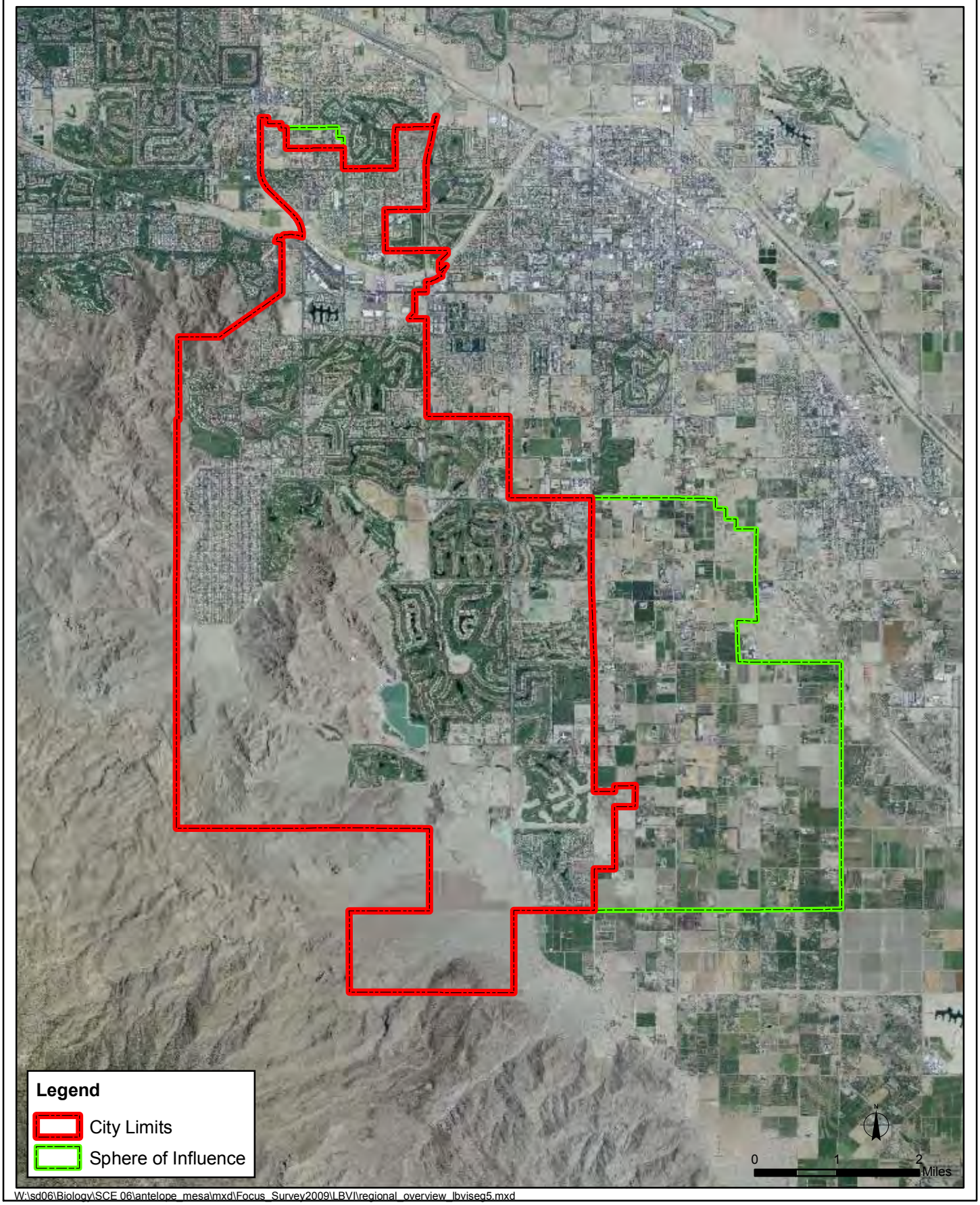
Map 1

La Quinta General Plan Update
Regional View



USGS 7.5' topo quads Indio, LaQuinta, Valerie, Martinez Mt

Map 2



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Map 3

La Quinta General Plan Update
Aerial View

2.0 METHODS

2.1 Literature Review

Existing biological information for the Planning Area was reviewed and summarized to provide a brief, but characteristic description of La Quinta. Sources consulted included the California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB 2010), various botanical and wildlife references pertaining to the La Quinta area; the Google Earth web application (2010); the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan website (2010), and biological surveys prepared by AMEC for projects in or near the planning area (AMEC 2003).

Soils of the study area were characterized according to information generated through the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service's Web Soil Survey data available for La Quinta (NRCS 2010).

Botanical nomenclature follows The Jepson Desert Manual (Baldwin et al. 2002), plant community descriptions are based on Holland (1986). Herpetological nomenclature follows Stebbins (2003). Avian taxonomy and nomenclature follows the American Ornithologists' Union 7th edition (1998). Mammalian data is based on Ingles (1965), with nomenclature following Bowers and Kaufman (2004). Wildlife habitat nomenclature follows Meyer and Laudenslayer (1988).

2.2 Field Visits

AMEC Biologist Nathan Moorhatch has conducted several biological surveys within the plan area for various projects, as well as several surveys in communities surrounding La Quinta. These surveys consisted of pedestrian surveys to assess the occurrence potential of special status species and habitats. Mr. Moorhatch visited the Plan Area (PA) on June 8, 2010 to ground truth CNDDB record sites of sensitive plants and animals, as well as assess the current condition of various habitat areas.

Previously mapped streambed information was evaluated in a regional context to ascertain probable permitting requirements in subsequent site-specific analysis actions undertaken within the planning area. Streambeds and/or washes likely to require state and/or federal permitting were briefly analyzed via recent aerial photography to assess natural integrity and natural biological community types.

3.0 RESULTS

The following information characterizes the Planning Area in general terms and serves as a baseline for subsequent site-specific analysis of affected lands. Elevations range from -130 feet at the southeast corner of the SOI (at the intersection of Harrison Street and 62nd Avenue) to ~1,700 feet above sea level in the southwestern corner of the study area in the Santa Rosa Mountains.

The higher terrain within the PA includes the lower slopes of the northeastern face of the Santa Rosa Mountains located on the southern and western areas of La Quinta. The lowest elevation terrain is associated with the agricultural fields that cover the SOI to the east.

The climate is arid with hot, dry summers and warm winters. Mean annual precipitation is less than five inches occurring as rain in late autumn/winter and occasionally in summer. Average high January temperature is 71 degrees Fahrenheit and average high July temperature is 107 degrees Fahrenheit; with summer high temperatures of over 120 degrees Fahrenheit having been recorded.

3.1 Soils

Eleven primary soil series (consisting of 24 discrete units) have been identified as occurring in the PA, including Carrizo Stony Sand, Carsitas Sands, Coachella Sands, Fluvents, Gravel Pits and Dumps, Gilman Sands and Loams, Indio Loams, Myoma Fine Sands, Rock Outcrop, Rubble Land, and Salton Fine Sandy Loam (Map).

These soils are largely well-drained, with the exception of the Salton Fine Sandy Loam (a soil type that only occurs in one small area of the SOI lands) and Rock Outcrop and Rubble Lands. Apart from the Rock Outcrops and Rubble Lands all the soil types present in the PA are formed in alluvium.

The northern portion of the study area is dominated by Myoma and Coachella Fine Sands. These soil types are known to support Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard (*Uma inornata*), Flat-tailed Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*), Coachella Valley Milkvetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae*), Slender Woolly Threads (*Nemacaulis denudata* var.*gracilis*), Glandular Ditaxis (*Ditaxis claryana*), Palm Springs Pocket Mouse (*Perognathus longimembris bangsi*), Coachella Valley Round-tailed Ground Squirrel (*Xerospermophilus tereticaudus chlorus*), Coachella Valley Giant Sand-treader Cricket (*Macrobaenetes valgum*), and Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*).

The western and southern portions of the study area are dominated by Rock Outcrop, Rubble Lands, and intervening areas of Carsitas Gravelly Sand, corresponding to the Santa Rosa Mountains and associated alluvial fans. This terrain provides habitat for Peninsular Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*), Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*), and California Ditaxis (*Ditaxis serrata* var. *californica*). Burrowing Owls have been observed on the alluvial fan habitat in the southern portion of the study area (AMEC 2003 – see Map 7). Both Le Conte's (*Toxostoma lecontei*) and Crissal Thrasher (*Toxostoma crissale*) have some potential to occur in alluvial and dry wash habitats present in this area. There is a very low potential for Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) to occur on the lower elevations of this portion of the PA.

Legend

Soil Types

- CcC: CARRIZO STONY SAND, 2-9% SLOPES
- CdC: CARSITAS GRAVELLY SAND, 0-9% SLOPES
- ChC: CARSITAS COBBLY SAND, 2-9% SLOPES
- CpA: COACHELLA FINE SAND, 0-2% SLOPES
- CrA: COACHELLA FINE SAND, WET, 0-2% SLOPES
- CsA: COACHELLA FINE SANDY LOAM, 0-2% SLOPES
- Fe: FLUVENTS
- GP: GRAVEL PITS & DUMPS
- GaB: GILMAN LOAMY FINE SAND, 0-5% SLOPES
- GbA: GILMAN FINE SANDY LOAM, 0-2% SLOPES
- GbB: GILMAN FINE SANDY LOAM, 2-5% SLOPES
- GcA: GILMAN FINE SANDY LOAM, WET, 0-2% SLOPES
- GdA: GILMAN FINE SANDY LOAM, MODERATELY FINE SUBSTRATUM, 0-2% SLOPES
- GeA: GILMAN SILT LOAM, 0-2% SLOPES
- GfA: GILMAN SILT LOAM, WET, 0-2% SLOPES
- Ip: INDIO FINE SANDY LOAM
- Ir: INDIO FINE SANDY LOAM, WET
- Is: INDIO VERY FINE SANDY LOAM
- It: INDIO VERY FINE SANDY LOAM, WET
- MaB: MYOMA FINE SAND, 0-5% SLOPES
- MaD: MYOMA FINE SAND, 5-15% SLOPES
- RO: ROCK OUTCROP
- RU: RUBBLE LAND
- Sa: SALTON FINE SANDY LOAM

No data at this time

No data at this time

Legend

- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence

La Quinta General Plan Update
Soils

Map 4.

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

1 inch = 4,389 feet

Data-
Projection: NAD 83 Zone 11
Resources:Soil Data Mart Ca680
Pathway:S:\active projects\La Quinta Specific Plan & EIR BRAR 322520050\graphics\base
Date: 6/2/10

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The majority of the eastern portion of the study area (made up principally of the SOI lands) is located on Gilman Fine Sandy Loams and Indio Very Fine Sandy Loams, with one significant area of Coachella Fine Sand. Much of this area has undergone conversion to agriculture. Apart from the one area of Coachella Fine Sand, these soil types are not the preferred soil types of many sensitive biological resources, with the possible exception of providing potential habitat for Burrowing Owl and Crissal Thrasher. The area of Coachella Fine Sand found on this portion of the PA is cut off from new sand sources, and has stabilized and supports a dense growth of saltbush, Russian Thistle (*Salsola tragus*), Alkali Goldenbush (*Isocoma acradenia*), and some Honey Mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa* var. *torreyana*) hummocks.

3.2 Streambeds and Waters

The principal natural water present in the study area is a segment of the Whitewater River/Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel that bisects the northern portion of the PA, and more or less runs parallel to the north side of Highway 111 (see Map 5). Several ephemeral stream courses drain the Santa Rosa Mountains on the western and southern portions of the study area, including the named Bear Creek drainage. The majority of these unnamed drainages qualify as state streambeds according to current California Fish and Game Code definition, but are not considered "Waters of the U.S." according to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) standards.

Surface disturbance and/or land development altering the bed and banks of any potential wash/streambed area requires site-specific California Streambed Alteration Agreement permitting with the CDFG (under Section 1600 of the California Fish and Game Code) and consultation with the Colorado River Regional Water Quality Control Board (7) [CRRWQCB]. In a like manner, surface disturbance involving dredge and/or fill activities affecting the streambanks or bed of the Whitewater River/Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel and its connected tributaries requires compliance with the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) and USACE.

The latter compliance work generally involves site-specific development consultation and on occasion, CWA Section 404/401 permitting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the CRRWQCB. Mitigation specific to the development and anticipated resource impact is required in instances where state streambeds and/or federal waters would be adversely impacted. Such mitigation usually involves avoidance of impacts where feasible, affected streambed habitat compensation where impacts are unavoidable and implementation of best management practices to reduce impacts to biological resources.

Potential impacts to streambeds and waters and associated California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis, are also discussed in Section 5 of this report.

WHITEWATER RIVER
DEEP CANYON WASH
COACHELLA VV STORM WATER CHANNEL
ALL AMERICAN CANAL
WASTEWAY NUMBER 3
STREAM
LA QUINTA CHANNEL
BEAR CREEK
BEAR CREEK
ALL AMERICAN CANAL GRAVITY LATERAL
DEVIL CANYON
TORO CANYON

Legend

- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Man-maded Waterways
- Blue Line Streams & Creeks

La Quinta Specific Plan & EIR BRAR
Blue Line Streams & Man-made Waterways

Map 5.

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

1 inch = 4,583 feet

Data-
Projection: NAD 83 Zone 11
Resources: California Spatial Information Library 2008-09-29, U.S. Geological Survey/RCFC & WCD Streams and Waterbodies of Riverside County, Cal 199501
Pathway:S:\active projects\La Quinta Specific Plan & EIR BRAR 322520050\graphics\base
Date: 6/2/10

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3.3 Vegetation and Flora

The area of La Quinta was first established in the early 18th century by Spanish conquistadores under the command of Captain Juan Bautista De Anza, as the fifth resting point for travelers along the route from present-day Mexico to the San Gabriel Missions of Los Angeles and present-day Riverside and San Bernardino. In the late-19th century and early-20th century (1880–1920), agriculture developed in present-day La Quinta. In 1927, Walter Morgan established the La Quinta Resort at the northern section of "Marshall Cove", as a type of secluded hideaway for Hollywood's celebrities and socialites. The Resort was the site for the Coachella Valley's first golf course coinciding with the construction and pavement of State Route 111 in the 1930s. There are now more than twenty golf courses built throughout the City. La Quinta was incorporated as a City in Riverside County in 1982, and underwent rapid growth in the 1990's. In the 1980 census, La Quinta had 4,200 residents, today it has over 41,000 residents.

As a result of this relatively long-term conversion of land first to agriculture, then more recently to recreational, commercial, and residential development; the majority of the natural habitats and communities once present on the "valley floor" within La Quinta and its SOI have largely been lost. A considerable amount of vegetation within developed portions of La Quinta consists of non-native woody plantings. The SOI area consists of a patchwork of active agriculture, interspersed with fallow areas in various stages of regrowth with both native and nonnative alkaline tolerant plants, and some small areas of more natural Desert Saltbush Scrub. A few components of former native plant communities are present in these fallow areas.

Minimally-disturbed surface areas in La Quinta are mainly limited to those areas of the Santa Rosa Mountains and their associated alluvial fans present in the western and southern areas of the PA. The lower elevations of the slopes and alluvial fans are vegetated with sparse Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub, with Desert Dry Wash Woodland communities and elements present in various drainages and shallow, braided channels throughout. Sonoran Mixed Woody and Succulent Scrub (often sparse) also intergrades with Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub in this area.

The northern portion of the study area originally consisted of aeolian sandy habitats such as desert dunes and sand field habitats. As development has progressed, the sand source and sand transport systems needed to sustain the active dune and sand field habitats have been blocked, resulting in stabilized sandy habitats that are more susceptible to establishment of non-native invasive plant species that in turn alter and/or degrade the natural expression of this community. Currently, only a few parcels of Stabilized Shielded Desert Sand Fields remain in the northern portion of the study area (see Maps 6 & 7). The majority of this habitat (including areas modeled as habitat for Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard and Coachella Valley Giant Sand Treader Cricket by the CVMSHCP) have been lost to residential and commercial development.

The following section discusses the native plant communities present in the study area.

Legend

Vegetation Communities

- Desert dry wash woodland
- Desert saltbush scrub
- Farmland
- Ruderal
- Stabilized sand field
- Urban
- Waterbodies
- Waterways
- Sonoran creosote bush scrub
- Sonoran mixed woody & succulent scrub

Legend

- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence

La Quinta General Plan Update
Vegetation Communities

Map 6.

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

1 inch = 4,579 feet

Data-
Projection: NAD 83 Zone 11
Resources: riverside county 1994 farmland layer-updated via aerial 2009
Pathway:S:\active projects\La Quinta Specific Plan & EIR BRAR 322520050\graphics\base
Date: 6/2/10

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3.3.1 Stabilized Shielded Sand Fields

This community is essentially similar to Stabilized and Partially Stabilized Desert Sand Fields except that sand source and sand transport systems, which would supply sand to the sand fields, have been interrupted or shielded by barriers such as roads, buildings, and landscaping. This natural community includes most of the remaining sand fields that historically made up the Big Dune south of Interstate 10. The long-term persistence of stabilized shielded desert sand fields is compromised by the interruption of the sand source and sand transport system. Sandfields are limited in La Quinta to the northern portion of the PA in the vicinity of Highway 111; and largely consist of smaller, fragmented parcels heavily disturbed by their proximity to roads. Most of these areas have been developed for residential and commercial projects. Representative plants found in this community include Sand Verbena (*Abronia villosa*), Fanleaf Crinklemat (*Tiquilia plicata*), California Croton (*Croton californicus*), Four-wing Saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), and Indian Ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*). A serious threat to this community (and sandy communities throughout the Sonoran and Mojave Deserts) is the invasion of Sahara Mustard (*Brassica tournefortii*). Sahara Mustard has been present in the Coachella Valley since the 1920's, and has been demonstrated to negatively impact native flora. Among wildlife species, the Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard has shown a negative response to increasing Sahara Mustard abundance. None of this community within the study area is of such high quality that it has been targeted for conservation in the MSHCP.

Figure 1. Remnant Stabilized Shielded Sand Field Habitat
Remnant Stabilized Shielded Sand Field habitat present on the northeast corner of Hwy. 111 and Dune Palms Road. Note dead Sahara Mustard present on the site.

Figure 2. Sand Field/Stabilized Dune SE of habitat in Figure 1
Sand Field/Stabilized Dune habitat SE of habitat in Figure 1, more Sahara Mustard present.

Figure 3. Sand Field habitat impacted for development, W. of Washington Street
Sand Field habitat impacted for development, west of Washington Street, between Avenues 48 & 47.

Figure 4. Semi-stabilized Sand Field/Dune habitat N. of Figure 3
Semi-Stabilized Dune/Sand Field habitat immediately north of habitat in Figure 3. St. Francis of Assisi church in background.

3.3.2 Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub

This is the most common natural community in the Coachella Valley area, dominated by Creosote Bush (*Larrea tridentata*), Burrobush (*Ambrosia dumosa*), Brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*), and other common desert perennials. This community may contain a very high proportion of annual wildflowers, representing up to 75% of the flora. Sonoran creosote bush scrub is found mainly above the shoreline of ancient Lake Cahuilla, and on the lower slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains, where it intergrades with Sonoran Mixed Woody and Succulent Scrub, and with Desert Dry Wash Woodland on portions of the alluvial fans and bajadas that spread out from the toe of slope of the mountains.

Figure 5. Lower slopes of the Santa Rosa Mtns. w/ sparse Creosote Bush Scrub
Lower slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains vegetated with sparse Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub. This area is west of Washington Street, between Avenues 47 & 48.

Figure 6. Sparse Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub N. of Coral Mountain
Sparse Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub north of Coral Mountain, southeast of Lake Cahuilla County Park, south side of 58th Avenue.

3.3.3 Sonoran Mixed Woody & Succulent Scrub

This plant community is similar to creosote bush scrub but more varied and usually with a higher plant density. This is the only Sonoran desert community in the Plan Area with a substantial dominance of cacti and other stem succulents. In addition to creosote bush and other associated perennial shrubs, typical species include Golden Cholla (*Opuntia echinocarpa*), Buckhorn Cholla (*Opuntia acanthocarpa),* Pencil Cholla (*Opuntia ramosissima*), Beavertail (*Opuntia basilaris*), California Barrel Cactus (*Ferocactus cylindraceus*), and Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*). This community occurs on alluvial fans and slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains, and intergrades broadly with Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub in these areas.

3.3.4 Desert Dry Wash Woodland

The desert dry wash woodland community is an open to dense, drought deciduous, microphyllous woodland to 30 - 60 feet tall, dominated by any of several members of the pea family including Blue Palo Verde (*Cercidium floridum*), Ironwood (*Olneya tesota*), and Smoketree (*Psorothamnus spinosus*). Associated species include Desert Lavender (*Hyptis emoryi*), Cheesebush (*Hymenoclea salsola*), Catclaw (*Acacia greggii*), and Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) (Baldwin and Martens 2002). It occurs in washes subject to intermittent flooding, but without perennial water. These washes are associated with canyon mouths and alluvial fans in the Santa Rosa Mountains in the Plan Area.

Figure 7. Sparse Desert Dry Wash Woodland, southern portion of study area
Sparse Desert Dry Wash Woodland present on the alluvial fans in the extreme southern portion of the study area.

Figure 8. Representative Desert Dry Wash Woodland
Representative Desert Dry Wash Woodland.

3.3.5 Desert Saltbush Scrub

The desert saltbush scrub community can include various species of saltbush in a nearly uniform stand of shrubs, forming a more complete cover than in creosote bush scrub. This community occupies areas where fine-textured, poorly drained soils with high salinity and/or alkalinity occur, habitats that are generally moist, with a sandy loam soil, and a total salinity in the range of 0.2 - 0.7%. One or more species of *Atriplex* are dominant in this community, including Big Saltbush (*Atriplex lentiformis*), Allscale (*Atriplex polycarpa)* and Four-winged Saltbush (*Atriplex canescens* var. *linearis*). Alkali Goldenbush and Honey Mesquite are common in some areas of this habitat type, such as east of Lake Cahuilla County Park (see Figure). Some of the long-fallow parcels scattered throughout the SOI lands on the eastern PA are vegetated with diminished examples of this habitat in various stages of regrowth. Such "pseudo-Saltbush Scrub" areas often have various non-native alkali-tolerant species present along with native *Atriplex*.

Figure 9. Disturbed Desert Saltbush Scrub, Alkali Goldenbush in foreground
Disturbed Desert Saltbush Scrub with Alkali Goldenbush in the foreground. South side of 58th Avenue, west of Madison Street.

Figure 10. Dense Saltbush Scrub, SW corner of 59th & Van Buren
Dense Saltbush habitat (w/ some Desert Sink Scrub species present) southwest corner of 59th Avenue and Van Buren Street. Note Mesquite hummocks in background. This is a former CNDDB record (1975) locale for Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard, habitat now too dense to support this species.

3.4 Wildlife Habitat and Common Fauna

Wildlife common to La Quinta are primarily associated with two categories of habitat. The first (and most prevalent) category includes a highly disturbed and fragmented patchwork of remnant sand field, saltbush scrub, ruderal, agricultural, and residential/recreational development; and the second consists of the native, far less altered habitats present on the western and southern portions of the study area (and that coincide with the extent of the Santa Rosas and associated alluvial fans and canyons present within the PA). Species capable of surviving in Ruderal (weedy) plant communities or in proximity to residential, commercial, agricultural, and golf course developments are common in the first category.

The remaining areas of native habitat present along the western and southern portions of the study area support both common desert species, as well as some sensitive species and plant communities.

3.4.1 Invertebrates

Many common desert (non-special status) insects and arachnids are known from La Quinta. Various Harvester Ant species (*Pogonomyrmex* and *Messor* sps.) and Crater-nest Ant (*Conomyrma* spp.) mounds evidence the considerable ant occurrence within Sand Field, Creosote, and Ruderal habitats. Non-native Argentine Ants (*Iridomyrmex humilis*) and Red Fire Ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) are known from well-watered residential yards and golf courses. The

Creosote Bush Grasshoppper (*Bootettix argentatus*) and Armored Darkling Beetle (*Eleodes armatus*) are also characteristic native insects.

Several species are specialized to live in the sandy habitats that were once common on the valley floor. Burrowing Sand Roaches (*Arenivaga* sp.) are unique in that the females have lost their wings and have a rounded, almost trilobite-like appearance. The delicate, ghostly pale males are winged and often are attracted to lights at night. Sand scorpions (*Paruroctonus* spp.) are often common in sandy habitats, sometimes reaching surprisingly high densities in less disturbed areas. Introduced European Honey Bees (*Apis mellifera*), as well as numerous native bees and wasps occur in the general area. In fact, the southwestern deserts support one of the highest diversities of bee and wasp species in the world.

The venomous Black Widow Spider (*Latrodectus mactans*) and Desert Loxosceles (*Loxosceles deserta*) are known to use structures which provide shade, as well as from woodpiles and debris piles.

3.4.2 Amphibians

A few non-special status amphibian species are known from the Whitewater River channel and vicinity, as well as from golf course ponds. Common amphibians encountered in suitably wet habitats include the California Toad (*Bufo boreas halophilus*), Pacific Tree Frog (*Pseudacris regilla*) and the non-native, but naturalized Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*). Red-spotted Toads (*Bufo punctatus*) a true desert toad, though uncommon, would also be expected to occur in suitably wet habitats within the Planning Area.

3.4.3 Reptiles

The La Quinta area has a rich herpetofauna. Non-special status lizards common to the Planning Area include the Great Basin Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris tigris*), Zebra-tailed Lizard (*Callisaurus draconoides*), Side-blotched Lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), Desert Iguana (*Dipsosaurus dorsalis*) and Desert Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos*). The non-special status Desert Banded Gecko (*Coleonyx variegatus variegatus*) is less commonly encountered due to its nocturnal habits. The Common Chuckwalla (*Sauromalus ater*) and Baja California Collared Lizard (*Crotaphytus vestigium*) both inhabit rocky hillsides, canyons, and alluvial fans.

Representative non-special status snakes known from the Planning area include Red Coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum piceus*), California Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula californiae*), and Sonoran Gopher Snake (*Pituophis catenifer affinis*). The venomous Colorado Desert Sidewinder (*Crotalus cerastes laterorepens*) occurs in sandy habitats, and the Southwestern Speckled Rattlesnake (*Crotalus mitchellii pyrrhus*) specializes in various rocky habitats. Two common snakes that specialize in sandy habitats include the Desert Glossy Snake (*Arizona occidentalis eburnata*) and Colorado Desert shovel-nosed snake (*Chionactis occipitalis annulata*).

3.4.4 Birds

Avian species known from the Planning Area can be categorized as neotropical migrants that only travel through La Quinta in spring and/or fall months; those migratory species which breed in La Quinta, but overwinter elsewhere; species which nest at more northerly latitudes and winter in La Quinta, and those bird species which are permanent residents of the study area.

Primary nesting habitats within the Planning Area include Desert Dry Wash Woodlands and wash habitats containing a mixed shrub and tree habitat; shrubs, ground surfaces and animal burrows within Creosote Bush, Saltbush and Ruderal Scrub communities; and residential/recreational area landscaping; and agricultural plantings (especially Date Palm groves).

Cliff faces, rock outcrops and hillsides located in mountainous areas within La Quinta's sphere of influence also provide nesting habitat for some birds (especially raptors and Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*).

Among the suite of birds which utilize Desert Dry Wash Woodland habitats, Verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*), Abert's Towhee (*Pipilo aberti*), Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*), Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*), and Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) can be considered characteristic species. Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), and American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) often utilize agricultural areas, with the Red-shouldered Hawk representing a fairly recent "colonizer" of Date Palm groves from its former primarily cismontane distribution.

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), and two hummingbird species are known to nest in landscaping features within La Quinta's residential areas, and on occasion, human structures. A few other bird species known to nest in such structures include Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*), Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and Common Raven.

The Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*), Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), Cactus Wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*), Common Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*), Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*), Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) and Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) are representative non special-status birds common to Creosote Bush, Saltbush, and Ruderal Scrub communities of the Planning Area.

Several additional songbird species use both desert riparian and scrub habitats in the winter months only, including the Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*), and Ruby-crowned Kinglet *(Regulus calendula*).

While the above bird species are common to the region and have not been designated species of concern, nearly all of them are afforded protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Nests, eggs, and incubating birds, as well as hatchling and fledgling birds, cannot be disturbed while birds are using active nests. It should be noted that the Burrowing Owl, although a "covered" species under the CVMSHCP, has another layer of protection via the MBTA. So while the CVMSHCP currently only requires surveys for this species in CVMSHCP Conservation Areas, in reality surveys and mitigation would be required regardless of the species location within the Plan Area.

3.4.5 Mammals

Larger non-special status mammals known from La Quinta include Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), Kit Fox (*Vulpes macrotis*), and Coyote (*Canis latrans*).

Small mammals common to the Planning Area include Pocket Mice (*Perognathus* spp.), Cactus Mouse (*Peromyscus eremicus*), Kangaroo Rats (*Dipodomys* spp.), Botta's Pocket Gopher (*Thomomys bottae*), Desert Woodrat (*Neotoma lepida*), White-tailed Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*) and California Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*).

These mammals have not been designated species of concern and many opportunistically use a variety of habitat types present within the Planning Area.

3.5 Special Status Species

A number of plants and animals occurring within the Planning Area are considered Special Status Species (Tables 1 and 2) due to designations issued by federal, state and/or local governing authorities. Other species occurring in this region are considered to have special status in this document due to local endemism or unique habitat use.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) maintain lists of species designated as officially threatened or endangered according to federal and state Endangered Species Acts respectively, which are subsets of the special status species discussed in this report. These agencies also maintain lists of species under consideration for such listing or that are protected under other statutes.

The California Native Plant Society (CNPS), a non-profit conservation organization, also maintains a listing of flora believed to be rare and/or endangered. CNPS List 1B plants are considered rare and endangered in California and throughout their range. CNPS List 2 plants are considered rare, threatened or endangered in California but are more common elsewhere. More information is needed for CNPS List 3 plants. CNPS List 4 plants are those of limited distribution, and are considered "watchlist" species.

These special status designations have been issued for planning and development permitting pursuits by the aforementioned authorities to increase consideration of species whose remaining population numbers and/or habitat conditions are declining. Site-specific biological surveys and assessments required for surface disturbance permitting generally focus on the potential presence and/or suitable habitat for special status species identified as occurring in an area, such as those discussed in this report.

Where the potential for impacts to state and/or federally-listed species is determined likely through site-specific evaluations, formal incidental take permitting per the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) and/or federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) is required. Similar consultation and specific impact minimization measures are also required when impacts to state-protected species are considered a likely impact of a proposed development action. The purpose of the CVMSHCP is to obtain Take Authorization (Take Permits) pursuant to Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) and the California Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Act for Covered Activities in the Coachella Valley while balancing environmental

protection with regional economic objectives and simplifying compliance with the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts and other applicable laws and regulations.

It should be recognized that the CVMSHCP does not address Section 404 of the Clean Water Act nor the Streambed Alteration Agreement provisions of the California Fish and Game Code, (Section 1600). Projects that currently require a Section 404 permit or Streambed Alteration Agreement will continue to do so notwithstanding the CVMSHCP because the CVMSHCP does not address issues associated with the Section 404 permit or Streambed Alteration Agreement. Additionally, the CVMSHCP does not provide a means of compliance with the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

Mitigation appropriate to the site-specific circumstance is then usually required prior to any surface disturbance taking place. Such measures with regard to listed/protected wildlife commonly include adherence to a set of best management practices, construction monitoring and project reporting, avoidance of impacts where possible, compensation for loss of habitat, and relocation or exclusion of affected animals per established criteria. Under the CVMSHCP, for covered species that are currently listed as threatened or endangered, the CVMSHCP is the basis for securing incidental take permits. For species covered under the CVMSHCP that are not currently listed, the Plan addresses the conservation of the species and its habitat as if the species were listed, so that if the species is subsequently listed, an incidental take permit will be issued on the basis of the MSHCP, and no further mitigation requirements will be imposed. A further goal of the plan is to remove the need to list species as threatened or endangered by taking proactive conservation measures. Mitigation is funded through a combination of development impact fees, open space trust funds, and funding from some permittees for infrastructure projects.

With regard to special status plants, the CDFG has adopted the CNPS-tabulated list of rare plants as a set of plant species that should be addressed during the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis of projects considered for permit authorization in the state. Mitigation relative to these plant species generally entails avoidance of habitat impacts, compensation for loss of habitat, and project reporting.

Tables 1 and 2 depict the Special Status Plant and Animal Species reported from La Quinta per the California Natural Diversity Database (keys follow tables), and AMEC biologist's knowledge and firsthand experience in the study area. Both listed and non-listed plant and wildlife species "covered" by the CVMSHCP are not addressed further in this report, as mitigation for impacts to these species are addressed through the CVMSHCP. Narratives describing those "non-CVMSHCP" sensitive plants and animals reported from the Planning Area, their associated habitats (Maps 7-12), and common impact mitigation measures follow in Sections 3.5.1 - 3.5.9. Potential impacts to species requiring agency consultation and/or CEQA analysis are discussed in Sections 4 and 5.

Table 1. Special Status Plants Reported from La Quinta, California.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat	State of California and Local Status	Federal Status	Reported Within Planning Area (PA)
Chaparral Sand-Verbena	*Abronia villosa* var. *aurita*	Sandy areas Chaparral/Desert dunes	CNPS List 1B.1 State: S2.1		Yes (1 CNDDB record, but site is now developed)
Coachella Valley Milk-Vetch	*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae*	Sonoran Desert Scrub sandy flats, dunes, etc.	CNPS List 1B.2 State: S2.1 CVMSHCP	Endangered	No (1 CNDDB record ~1 mi. W. of PA in Indian Wells now a golf course, some modeled habitat present in PA)
Glandular Ditaxis	*Ditaxis claryana*	Sandy habitats Sonoran Desert scrub 0-465 meters	CNPS List 2.2 State: S1S2		Yes (1 of 3 CNDDB sites in PA still habitat)
California Ditaxis	*Ditaxis serrata* var. *californica*	Sonoran Desert Scrub	CNPS List 3.2 State: S2.2		Yes (1 CNDDB record in PA, site still has habitat)
Slender Woolly Threads	*Nemacaulis denudata* var. *gracilis*	Coastal & desert dunes, Sonoran Desert scrub	CNPS List 2.2 State: S2S3		No (2 CNDDB records from Indian Wells near PA have been developed as golf courses, 1 record from Deep Canyon ~3 mi. W. of PA still habitat)

Table 2. Special Status Animals Reported from La Quinta, California.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat	State of California and Local Status	Federal Status	Reported Within Planning Area (PA)
INVERTEBRATES					
Casey's June Beetle	*Dinacoma caseyi*	Only known from 2 populations in a small area of S. Palm Springs, sandy alluvial habitats	State: S1	Proposed Endangered	No (1953 CNDDB record ~1 mi. W. of PA in Indian Wells is now residential development)
Coachella Giant Sand Treader Cricket	*Macrobaenetes valgum*	Sand dune ridges and habitats	State: S1S2 CVMSHCP		No (2 of 3 CNDDB records have been developed from surrounding areas, 1 record from 0.18 mi. W. of PA in Indian Wells has habitat remaining)
REPTILES					
Flat-tailed Horned Lizard	*Phyrnosoma mcallii*	Sandy habitats with adjacent hardpan, often sparsely vegetated, also saltbush habitats	State: S2 CDFG: CSC CVMSHCP		Yes (2 CNDDB records from PA, 1 has been converted to residential, the other has disturbed habitat)
Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard	*Uma inornata*	Sand dunes, sand fields	CDFG: Endangered/ S1 CVMSHCP	Threatened	Yes (only 2 of 23 CNDDB records not developed in PA, remaining 2 ground-truthed 6/9/10 – no longer appear viable)
Desert Tortoise	*Gopherus agassizii*	Creosote Bush Scrub	Threatened CVMSHCP	Threatened	No (No CNDDB records from PA, but modeled habitat present at base of the Santa Rosa Mountains)

Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat	State of California and Local Status	Federal Status	Reported Within Planning Area (PA)
BIRDS					
Burrowing Owl	*Athene cunicularia*	Burrows/abandoned foundation structures, Creosote Bush & Ruderal Scrub (edges of canals/agriculture)	State: S2 CDFG: CSC CVMSHCP		Yes (AMEC 2003, observed 3 owls in T6S, R7E, Sec. 33 & 34 – adjacent to the CVWD Dike)
Prairie Falcon	*Falco mexicanus*	Cliff faces (nesting), Open habitats for Foraging	State: S3 CDFG: Watchlist		Yes (2 of 3 CNDDB sites have been developed [but have habitat nearby], 1 site still has nesting habitat)
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	*Polioptila melanura*	Desert scrub and desert wash woodland habitats	State: S4		Yes (2 of 3 CNDDB sites still have habitat, AMEC 2003 observed this species in southern PA)
Loggerhead Shrike	*Lanius ludovicianus*	Fairly common in a variety of open habitats	State: S4 CDFG: CSC		Yes (AMEC 2003, observed this species in southern PA)
Crissal Thrasher	*Toxostoma crissale*	Desert riparian habitat, Desert washes	State: S3 CDFG: CSC CVMSHCP		No (1932 CNDDB record ~1 mi. W. of PA in Indian Wells is a Golf course now)
Le Conte's Thrasher	*Toxostoma lecontei*	Shrubs, washes, Creosote Bush Scrub	State: S3 CDFG: CSC CVMSHCP		No (1919 CNDDB record ~1 mi. W. of PA in Indian Wells is a Golf course now)

Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat	State of California and Local Status	Federal Status	Reported Within Planning Area (PA)
MAMMALS					
Western Yellow Bat	*Lasiurus xanthinus/ega*	Primarily roosts in the dead fronds of palms, including landscape specimens	State: S3 CDFG: CSC CVMSHCP		Yes (only CNDDB record is now a golf course, but could roost in untrimmed palms throughout PA)
Pocketed Free-tailed Bat	*Nyctinomops femorosaccus*	Variety of arid habitats Desert Scrub, Palm Oasis, Desert Wash, roosts in rocky cliffs	State: S2S3 CDFG: CSC		Yes (1 CNDDB record in PA, now golf course, but could forage & drink at golf courses)
Palm Springs Round-tailed Ground Squirrel	*Xerospermophilus tereticaudus chlorus*	Desert Scrub, Desert Wash, Alkali Scrub, & levees, golf course edges w/ adjacent native habitat	State: S1S2 CDFG: CSC CVMSHCP	Candidate	Yes (1 CNDDB record in PA, commercial development now, potential habitat still present in PA)
Palm Springs Pocket Mouse	*Perognathus longimembris bangsi*	Prefers sandy soils w/ sparse vegetation, most numerous at W. end of CVMSHCP plan area	State: S2S3 CDFG: CSC CVMSHCP		No (modeled habitat present in PA)
Peninsular Bighorn Sheep	*Ovis canadensis nelsoni* DPS	Lower elevations of the eastern Peninsular Ranges, including canyon bottoms, alluvial fans, and mountain slopes	Threatened CVMSHCP	Endangered	Yes (Critical Habitat in PA [Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mtns. Conservation Area])

KEYS TO TABLES 1 and 2

Habitat: terrestrial natural community descriptions per Holland (1986)

State of California and Local Status: Endangered, Threatened, Protected, Special Concern status per the California Fish and Game Code of 2007, as well as all species protected by the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (species covered by plan listed as CVMSHCP).

Federal Status: Endangered, Threatened and Candidate for listing status per the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended). It is mandatory that federally listed plant species be fully considered during preparation of environmental documents pertaining to the California Environmental Quality Act or National Environmental Policy Act, or any federal authorization.

California Native Plant Society (CNPS) listing rankings (CNPS 2010) are described as follows:

List 1A: Plants (29) presumed extinct in California because they have not been seen or collected in the wild in California for many years.

List 1B: Plants considered rare and endangered in California and throughout their range. All of the plants constituting List 1B meet the definitions of Section 1901, Chapter 10 (Native Plant Protection Act) or Sections 2062 and 2067 (California Endangered Species Act) of the California Department of Fish and Game Code and are eligible for state listing. It is mandatory that these plant species be fully considered during preparation of environmental documents pertaining to the California Environmental Quality Act.

List 2: Plants considered rare, threatened or endangered in California but which are more common elsewhere.

List 3: Plants about which more information is needed to assign them to one of the other lists.

List 4: Plants of limited distribution (a "watch list") or infrequent throughout a broader area in California, their vulnerability to threat appears low at this time.

Threat Rank

- **01.** Seriously threatened in California (high degree/immediacy of threat)
- **02.** Fairly threatened in California (moderate degree/immediacy of threat)
- **03.** Not very threatened in California (low degree/immediacy of threat)

State Ranks

S1: 5 or fewer viable occurrences or fewer than 1,000 individuals statewide and/or less than 2,000 acres
S2: 6 – 20 viable occurrences or fewer than 3,000 individuals statewide and/or 2,000 – 10,000 acres
S3: 21 – 100 viable occurrences or fewer than 10,000 individuals statewide and/or 10,000 – 50,000 acres
S4: Greater than 100 viable occurrences statewide and/or greater than 50,000 acres, apparently secure statewide
S5: Community demonstrably secure statewide

Where two ranks are given (eg. S1S2) the species' rank falls between the two ranks

Threat Ranks

- **0.1:** Very threatened
- **0.2:** Threatened
- **0.3:** No current threats known

Reported within Planning Area: Includes observations by AMEC personnel, reports by knowledgeable individuals, and entries in the California Natural Diversity Database (CDFG 2010).

3.5.1 Plants

3.5.1.1 Glandular Ditaxis (*Ditaxis claryana*)

This small perennial herb (Figure 11) of the Spurge Family has been recorded from sandy habitats in Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub in the Plan Area. Both CNDDB record locations were examined during preparation of this report, and both sites have been developed. Glandular Ditaxis blooms from October through March, and is found at elevations below 1,500 feet. This species is a CNPS List 2.2 and has a state rank of S1S2. There is a low potential to encounter this species within the western and southern portions of the Planning Area, as suitable habitat occurs in these areas. Avoidance of identified populations, generally detected with a spring or fall season survey following sufficient rainfall, is the primary means of mitigating impacts to this species.

Figure 11. Glandular Ditaxis (*Ditaxis claryana*)
Glandular Ditaxis (Ditaxis claryana). [Photo: Southwest Environmental Information Network]

3.5.1.2 California Ditaxis (*Ditaxis serrata* var. *californica*)

Another small perennial herb (Figure 12) of the Spurge Family. This plant is found in dry washes, flood plains, and rocky alluvial fans. The 1997 CNDDB record is from the eastern foot of Indio Mountain, on a rocky and gravelly area near a wash mouth, west of Avenida Montezuma and Calle Nogales. This location still has viable habitat for this species. California Ditaxis has recently been elevated to full species status, and is often listed as *Ditaxis californica.* California Ditaxis is a CNPS List 3.2, with a state rank of S2.2.

Figure 12. Serrate Ditaxis (*Ditaxis serrata var. ?*)
Serrate Ditaxis (*Ditaxis serrata* var. ?). Photo: 2010 Thomas Stoughton

There is a moderate to hight potential to encounter this species within the western and southern portions of La Quinta. California Ditaxis blooms from March through December. Avoidance of populations, generally detected with a spring season survey following sufficient rainfall, is the primary means of mitigating impacts to this species.

3.5.2 Birds

3.5.2.1 Burrowing Owl (Athene cunicularia)

Burrowing Owls have been observed by AMEC Biologists in the southern portion of the Planning Area during surveys conducted during 2003 (see Map 7). This small, terrestrial owl uses burrows constructed by other animals such as the Desert Tortoise, Kit Fox, and Coyote, as well as those constructed by ground squirrels (BLM 2005b). Burrowing Owls (Figure 13) will also utilize man-made habitats, including concrete rubble piles, pipes, and structures.

Figure 13. Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)
Burrowing Owl (Athene cunicularia).
[Photo: Stephen J. Myers, AMEC Earth and Environmental, ©2005.]

Male owls are slightly larger than females. The species is considered monogamous during the breeding season, which begins in February. Active during both the day and at night, the species frequently uses crepuscular time periods for hunting.

Arthropods often comprise the majority of prey items, though the species is a dietary generalist. Active burrows often exhibit sign of "whitewash," along with feathers and regurgitated pellets of undigestable portions of prey. Several burrows are commonly used by an owl pair, but numerous owls can occupy a very small area containing abundant burrows.

Open, dry, and level desert floor habitat is preferred by the species. Egg incubation generally lasts 28 days, with the female remaining in the burrow for most of that time, fed by the male. Young birds begin feeding themselves when they are roughly a month old. A new burrow is commonly selected at this time and the owl family relocates as a group, with young remaining near parents into September (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Threats to Burrowing Owls include habitat loss, poisoning, and vehicle collisions. OHV activity is a threat to the habitat of this species, as their burrows can be crushed and their nest sites disturbed. As a protected raptor and species of special concern, the CDFG must be notified and specific mitigation implemented when a proposed action might impact the species.

Commonly applied mitigation includes avoidance of actively-used burrows during the nesting season, passive relocation of owls (Trulio 1995) that could be affected by soil disturbance activities, and habitat-loss compensation. The habitat compensation formula applied by the CDFG, subject to periodic change, requires 6.5 acres of occupied replacement habitat for the loss of habitat occupied by each owl. Mitigation banking services are available which can fulfill compensation requirements. Passive relocation, when approved by the CDFG, involves collapsing suitable owl-use burrows when all owls are verified to be above-ground and away from potential harm. Potential habitat for Burrowing Owls is present throughout the study area, wherever undeveloped or fallow land is present (with the exception of the steep slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains).

3.5.2.2 Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)

The tawny-colored Prairie Falcon (Figure 14) is a medium-large raptor of dry, open habitats that preys chiefly on birds, small mammals, and reptiles. This migratory species winters in southern California, Baja California and northern Mexico. Cliffs and/or steep rock ledges, present on the western and southern portions of the Planning Area, are required for nesting.

Nesting has been recorded from the southwest corner of the study area (CNDDB 1977 – see Map 7). This area still has nesting habitat for the species, as does much of the more rugged terrain present in the western and southern portions of the Plan Area. An eyrie was located within the study area in the hills above Bear Creek in 1981 (LaPré, 1981a). Three eyries were reported as being located within the La Quinta Redevelopment Area in 1983, with a fourth just outside that boundary (LSA, 1993). The species has been reported to have low nest site tenacity (Ehrlich et al. 1988) and parental care of young continues after fledging.

This top of the food chain raptor is also known to use boulders and rock outcrops for perching and feeding, when these features occur in proximity to open habitats. Susceptible to metallic poisoning, some eggshell thinning and mercury poisoning of the species have been recorded. This raptor is also easily disturbed during nesting, with prolonged adult absence from the nest often caused by disturbance detrimental to nesting success.

As a protected raptor and a “Taxa to Watch”, the CDFG must be notified and specific mitigation implemented when a proposed action might impact the species. Mitigation commonly applied to projects which might affect the species includes conducting appropriate pre-construction surveys to identify potential nest disturbance impacts, particularly in proximity to the Santa Rosa Mountains.

Figure 14. Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)
Prairie Falcon (Falco mexicanus).
[Photo: Chet McGaugh, AMEC Earth and Environmental, ©2006.]

3.5.2.3 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*)

This is a small, insectivorous bird which ranges throughout the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts of the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico. This is a resident (nonmigratory) songbird (Figure 15) that lives in pairs all year, defending their territory and foraging in trees and low shrubs for a wide variety of small insects and spiders. The nest is an open-cup, built by both sexes, and is typically found in low shrubs less than five feet off the ground. It is constructed of a variety of materials including weeds, grass, strips of bark, spider webs, and plant fibers. It is lined with finer, softer matter. Three to five bluish-white eggs with red-brown dots are incubated by both parents and take 14 days to hatch. The young are fed by both parents, and leave the nest 10 to 15 days after hatching.

Figure 15. Male Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*)
Male Black-tailed Gnatcatcher in breeding plumage. (Photo: Steve Myers – AMEC).

There are two CNDDB record locales for Black-tailed Gnatcatcher in the Plan Area (see Map 7), both of which still support viable habitat for the species. Black-tailed Gnatcatchers are likely to occur throughout the native habitats present on the western and southern portions of the Plan Area. The Black-tailed Gnatcatcher has a state rank of S4. Limiting impacts to Desert Dry Wash Woodland and Sonoran Creosote Bush Scrub habitats are considered important conservation prescriptions for the species.

3.5.2.4 Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

The Loggerhead Shrike is found throughout the southern and western United States. Its populations have been depleted in many parts of the country, such as the Midwest and Florida, where it is listed as threatened. The loggerhead shrike remains fairly common in California, especially in the desert regions. Even with urbanization of many desert areas, the shrike does not appear to be declining to the point of demanding extraordinary conservation efforts, and it was not included as a target species of the CVMSHCP. This species is considered a “CSC” and has a state rank of S4. This bird is relatively common in undeveloped areas of La Quinta, the surrounding hillsides, and the edges of agricultural fields.

Figure 16. Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)
Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*).

3.5.3 Mammals

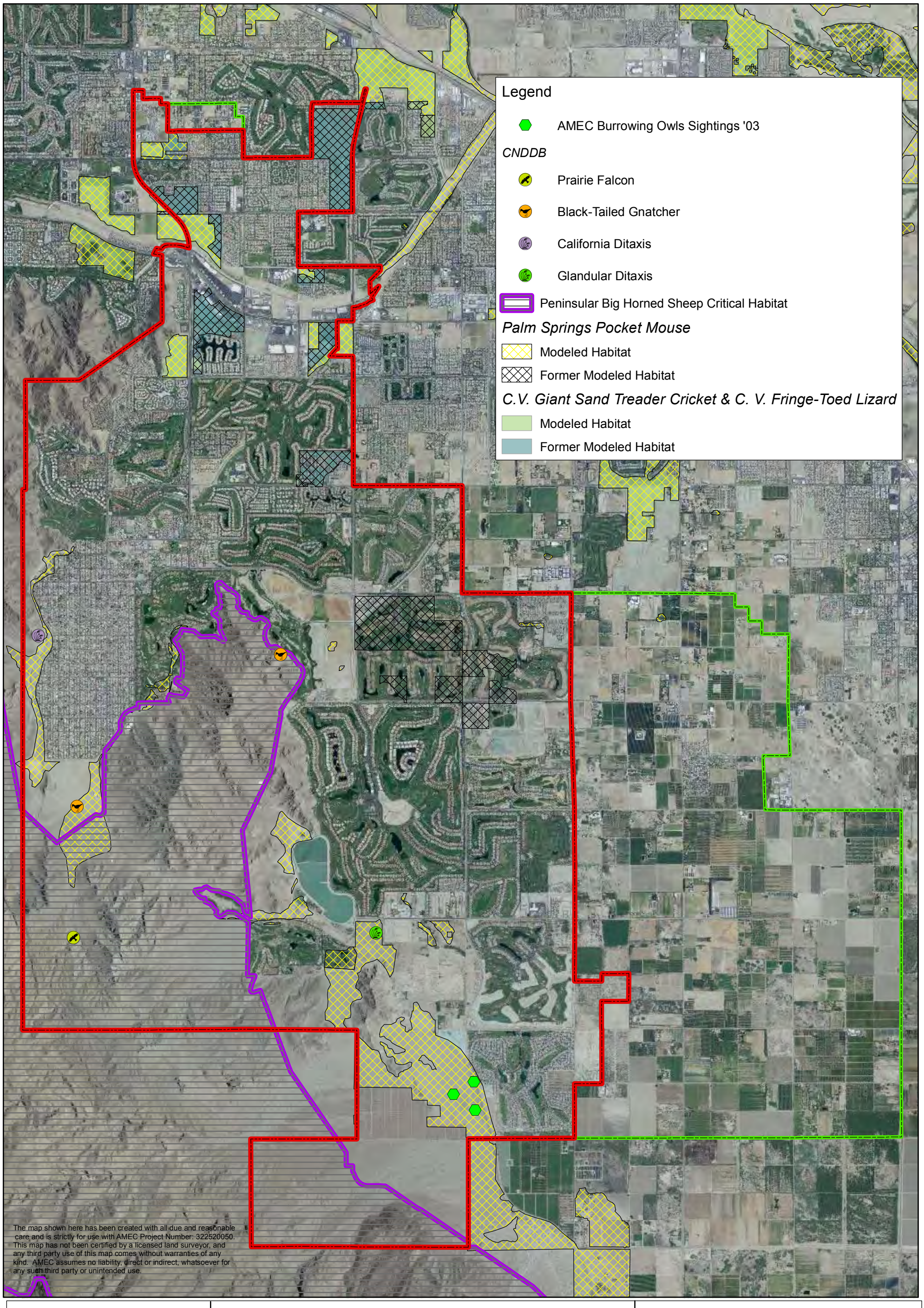
3.5.3.1 Pocketed Free-tailed Bat (*Nyctinomops femorosaccus*)

Figure 17. Pocketed Free-tailed Bat (*Nyctinomops femorosaccus*)
Pocketed Free-tailed Bat (*Nyctinomops femorosaccus*).
[Photo: Roger W. Barbour]

A small fold, or "pocket" in the wing membrane of the free-tailed bat, near its knee, gives this bat its common name. Pocketed free-tailed bats have large ears and long wings, and fly rapidly, generally pursuing insects on the wing. They eat many kinds of insects, but seem to prefer small moths. Small colonies, usually fewer than 100 bats, roost together in caves, crevices in rocky cliffs, or buildings. Females have a single pup each year, not twins.

The single CNDDB record (1994) from the Plan Area has been developed as a golf course, but this species still has the potential to utilize the golf course area for foraging and drinking. Suitable roosting habitat is present immediately east of this locale. The Pocketed Free-tailed Bat is a CDFG “CSC” and has a state rank of S2S3.

Habitat loss and indiscriminant use of pesticides are considered the greatest threats to many bat species in the Coachella Valley. Limiting impacts to the rocky habitats that this species could use for roosting is one conservation measure that can be implemented for this species.



Legend

City Limits

Sphere of Influence

La Quinta General Plan Update
CNDDB, Critical Habitat, & Modeled Habitat

Map 7.

0 0.2 0.4 0.8 Miles

1 inch = 4,333 feet

Data-
Projection: NAD 83 Zone 11
Resources:CNDDB march v3.1.1
AMEC survey 2003
Pathway:S:\active projects\La Quinta Specific Plan & EIR BRAR 322520050\graphics\base
Date: 6/2/10

N

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3.6 Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

Finalized in October 2008, the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) is a comprehensive, relatively new regional plan that addresses the conservation needs of 27 species of native flora and fauna and 24 natural vegetation communities occurring throughout the Coachella Valley region of western Riverside County, California.

The CVMSHCP serves two primary purposes: balancing environmental protection and economic development objectives in the MSHCP area, and simplifying compliance with endangered species related laws. The MSHCP accomplishes this by conserving unfragmented habitat to permanently protect and secure viable populations of the covered species. The covered species include those plants and animals that are either currently listed as threatened or endangered, are proposed for listing, or are believed by an appointed Scientific Advisory Committee, USFWS and CDFG, to have a high probability of being proposed for listing in the future if not provided protection by the CVMSHCP. The goal of the CVMSHCP is to meet the requirements of the state and federal endangered species acts, while at the same time allowing for the economic growth (land development) within the plan area without significant delay or hidden costs. Under the CVMSHP, land development/mitigation fees are collected from all new development projects occurring in the plan area. The purpose of this fee is to support the assembly of a preserve system for the covered species and natural vegetation communities within areas identified as having high conservation value. The fees vary according to the type and level of development proposed.

A fee of $5,730 per acre of Development is used in the revenue projection. This is the estimated Local Development Mitigation Fee amount in the first year of Plan implementation. The fee ordinance adopted by the Cities and the County will provide for an annual CPI adjustment based upon the Consumer Price Index for “All Urban Consumers” in the Los Angeles-Anaheim-Riverside Area, measured as of the month of December in the calendar year which ends in the previous Fiscal Year. There will also be a provision for the fee to be reevaluated and revised should it be found insufficient to cover mitigation of new Development. The CVCC will update the Nexus Study at least every five years, and more often if deemed necessary, to ensure that the Local Development Mitigation Fee is adequate over the life of the acquisition program to fund the necessary land acquisition and land improvement. For purposes of projecting revenue, it is assumed that the fee will increase 3.29% annually. The projected revenue from the Local Development Mitigation Fee is anticipated to be approximately $516,802,000 over the first 50 years of Plan implementation, based on the updated Nexus Study prepared in August 2006. The Local Permittees intend to generate funds for Plan implementation from sources in addition to the Local Development Mitigation Fee.

4.0 POTENTIAL PLANNING AREA DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS

Individual land development actions considered for authorization within the La Quinta Planning Area are addressed through participation in the CVMSHCP.

Increased recreational visitation to open space lands and remaining undisturbed plant communities are anticipated with future area growth. Associated increases in human uses/vehicle travel through undisturbed plant communities are likely to pose a distinct potential for further garbage dumping, impacts to remaining native habitats, and possibly more frequent wildfires.

The continued establishment and spread of certain non-native plants (particularly Sahara Mustard) would also be expected over time. In turn, these biological impacts would be expected to adversely affect native species and/or supporting habitats in a variety of ways. Although, much of the sand field habitat favored by this invasive mustard has already been developed for residential, recreational, and commercial purposes.

Wildlife species are likely to be displaced, injured, or killed as a result of continued property development, vehicle travel, soil alteration, removal of vegetation, and/or degradation of habitats in certain portions of the Planning Area that still contain native habitats. Courtship behaviors and breeding by some native wildlife are likely to be disrupted during the course of individual development actions.

There is a distinct potential for adverse impacts where listed animals occur as residents or seasonal migrants, resulting in incidental take of these species. Should impacts to special status species occur, they would add to the cumulative impacts each species already faces in the rapidly growing Coachella Valley.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

As future development in the Planning Area could generate significant direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to the "non-CVMSHCP" resources identified in this document, several recommendations are offered relative to affected special status species and protection of representative biodiversity in the La Quinta Planning Area.

According to CEQA § 15370 analysis guidance, major impacts should be mitigated to a less than significant level. CEQA defines mitigation as measures that (a) avoid the impact; (b) minimize the magnitude of the action; (c) rectify the impact by repairing environmental impacts; (d) reduce or eliminate the impact over time by preservation actions; and/or (e) compensating for the impact over time by replacing or providing substitute environments.

Fortunately, most of the CNDDB records of sensitive species known from the Plan Area that still have habitat capable of supporting these species are located in areas that remain undeveloped. Development of such "wild" areas will require compliance with the development terms and fees of the CVMSHCP. The result being that even though the sensitive biological resources discussed in Sections 3.5.1 – 3.5.7 are not "covered" species under the CVMSHCP, they still receive a similar level of defacto protection. In order to identify and characterize impacts to these natural resources, development actions subject to City of La Quinta authorization should be carefully analyzed with the benefit of this document's background information and site-specific biological survey data. Basic survey parameters for key special status species and other significant natural resources, as well as associated permitting requirements, are outlined in Section 5.1 below. With the benefit of site-specific survey data, a suite of measures can often be applied to effectively mitigate resource impacts of individual development actions.

Only one Conservation Area as established by the CVMSHCP is present within the La Quinta Plan Area. This is the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area. This area consists of those mountainous lands located west of the eastern edge of the Santa Rosa Mountains that fall within the Plan Area. Any development planned in this Conservation Area will require compliance with the specific goals and measures as outlined in the CVMSHCP. Some of the conservation goals outlined for the portion of this conservation area present in the Plan Area include:

- As of June 2003, conserve at least 19,205 acres of Essential Habitat for Peninsular bighorn sheep in the Riverside County portion of the Conservation Area, including at least 2,545 acres in the City of La Quinta portion.
- As of June 2003, conserve at least 387 acres of Other Conserved Habitat for Le Conte's thrasher in the City of La Quinta portion.
- As of June 2003, conserve at least 1,409 acres of Other Conserved Habitat for Desert Tortoise in the City of La Quinta portion.
- As of June 2003, conserve at least 76 acres of desert dry wash woodland natural community in the City of La Quinta portion.
- Conserve occupied burrowing owl burrows as described in Section 4.4 of the CVMSHCP burrowing owl avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

5.1 Biological Survey Requirements and Land Use Permitting

5.1.1 Migratory/Nesting/Protected Birds

Lands which may be impacted by development activities should be surveyed for the presence of migratory and residential birds prior to surface disturbance taking place. Bird nests, when occupied, are protected under the auspices of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and cannot be harmed or removed until nesting has been completed. Nesting native birds are also generally protected under the California Fish and Game Code.

Where non-protected and/or non-listed bird species are not involved, nesting season avoidance is generally sufficient to mitigate/avoid any anticipated avian impacts. Only knowledgeable personnel should conduct requisite avian surveys and survey results should be fully documented.

Where a state-protected bird species (i.e., Burrowing Owl, Prairie Falcon) may be affected by a property development or surface disturbance action, the CDFG must be contacted to determine an appropriate course of action. Complete surveys for the Burrowing Owl by qualified personnel are commonly recommended for scheduled surface disturbance activities in the Planning Area. These surveys should be conducted within 30-45 days of planned surface disturbance, as both migratory and resident birds can move into suitable habitat at various times of the year. A specific Burrowing Owl survey protocol has been established by CDFG and the Burrowing Owl Consortium (1997) to guide such survey efforts.

5.1.1.1.1 Burrowing Owl Mitigation

The Coachella Valley MSHCP presents the following stipulations regarding Burrowing Owl Mitigation: "This measure does not apply to single-family residences and any non-commercial accessory uses and structures including but not limited to second units on an existing legal lot, or to O&M of Covered Activities other than levees, berms, dikes, and similar features that are known to contain burrowing owl burrows. O&M of Final Recirculated Coachella Valley MSHCP – September 2007 4-169 roads is not subject to this requirement. For other projects that are subject to CEQA, the Permittees will require burrowing owl surveys in the Conservation Areas using an accepted protocol (as determined by the CVCC in coordination with the Permittees and the Wildlife Agencies). Prior to Development, the construction area and adjacent areas within 500 feet of the Development site, or to the edge of the property if less than 500 feet, will be surveyed by an Acceptable Biologist for burrows that could be used by burrowing owl. If a burrow is located, the biologist will determine if an owl is present in the burrow. If the burrow is determined to be occupied, the burrow will be flagged and a 160-foot buffer during the non-breeding season and a 250-foot buffer during the breeding season, or a buffer to the edge of the property boundary if less than 500 feet, will be established around the burrow. The buffer will be staked and flagged. No Development or O&M activities will be permitted within the buffer until the young are no longer dependent on the burrow. If the burrow is unoccupied, the burrow will be made inaccessible to owls, and the Covered Activity may proceed. If either a nesting or escape burrow is occupied, owls shall be relocated pursuant to accepted Wildlife Agency protocols. A burrow is assumed occupied if records indicate that, based on surveys conducted following protocol, at least one burrowing owl has been observed occupying a burrow on site during the past three years. If there are no records for the site, surveys must be conducted to determine, prior to construction, if burrowing owls are present. Determination of the appropriate method of relocation, such as eviction/passive relocation or active relocation, shall be based on

the specific site conditions (e.g., distance to nearest suitable habitat and presence of burrows within that habitat) in coordination with the Wildlife Agencies. Active relocation and eviction/passive relocation require the preservation and maintenance of suitable burrowing owl habitat determined through coordination with the Wildlife Agencies. Within one (1) year of Permit issuance, CVCC will cooperate with County Flood Control, CVWD and IID to conduct an inventory of levees, berms, dikes, and similar features in the Plan Area maintained by those Permittees. Burrowing owl burrow locations will be mapped and each of these Permittees will incorporate the information into its O&M practices to avoid impacts to the burrowing owl to the maximum extent Feasible. CVCC in cooperation with County Flood Control, CVWD, and IID will prepare a manual for maintenance staff, educating them about the burrowing owl and appropriate actions to take when owls are encountered to avoid impacts to the maximum extent Feasible. The manual will be submitted to the Wildlife Agencies for review and comment within two (2) years of Permit issuance. In conjunction with the Monitoring Program, the maps of the burrowing owl locations along the above-described levees, berms, dikes, and similar features will be periodically updated."

The Permittee should bear in mind that the MSHCP language presented above does not fully address the conditions of the MBTA outlined in Section 5.1.1. Habitat assessments and focused surveys for Burrowing Owls should be conducted wherever fallow land in the PA is determined to have suitable habitat for Burrowing Owls, and should not be limited solely to Conservation Areas.

5.1.1.2 Washes and Streambeds

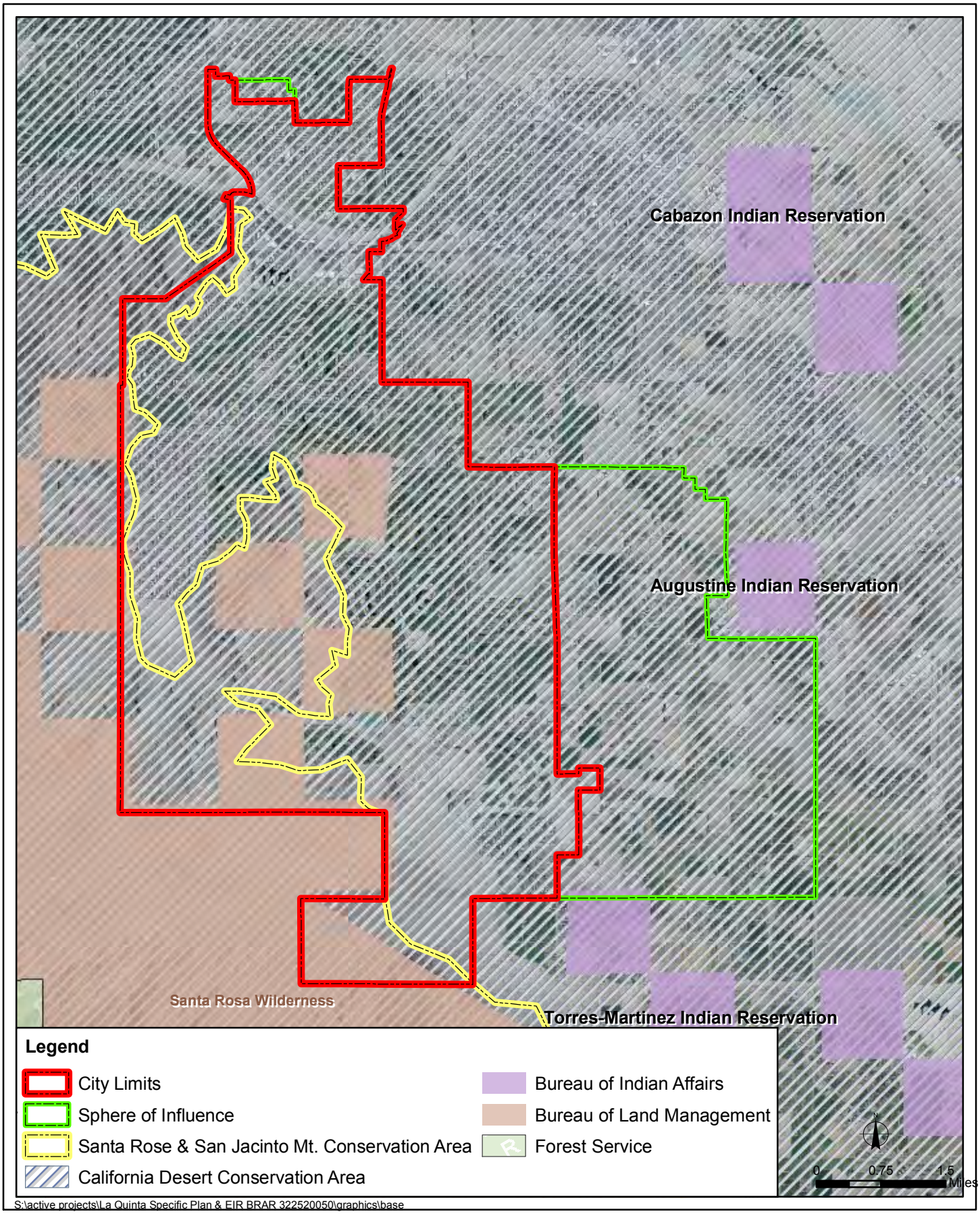
Land development actions potentially impacting the Whitewater River and/or other streambeds within the Planning Area can sometimes necessitate extensive survey work. Projects resulting in "cut and/or fill" impacts to the Whitewater River, a jurisdictional "water of the United States," are usually required to complete a formal delineation of the affected stream reach(es).

Authorized surface disturbance in the Whitewater River and certain streambeds (Map) may also require compliance with Sections 401 (Water Quality Certification) and 404 (Federal Waters) of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Such permitting shall require consultation with the Colorado River Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRRWQCB) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

Where CWA permitting with USACE is required, individual and nationwide programmatic permit application venues exist which are guided by project size and other parameters. CDFG notification by a prospective development proponent, sometimes involving the subsequent preparation of a Streambed Alteration Agreement, is also required in any instance where the Whitewater River or other streambed/wash might be affected by surface disturbing activities.

Where Whitewater River and/or streambed habitat is to be impacted by a proposed surface disturbing action, affected land compensation may be required. Such compensation requirements commonly applied in the past have involved a 3:1 ratio, i.e., three acres of replacement lands are required for every acre of streambed affected by surface disturbance.

A suite of agency-approved best management practices are also commonly required during any such permitted surface disturbance work.



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Map 8

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Land Ownership & Conservation Areas

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